

Thinking about Support and Supervision

All volunteers need support and supervision. The form that this takes will vary wildly. Volunteers at a one off event will need different support to a long term volunteer. What is important is that it is appropriate to the role, and the individual volunteer.

The point is to remember that everyone is an individual. Some volunteers will need a lot of help and support from their organisation, perhaps due to a disability or mental health problem. Don't prejudge what support someone might need- ask them. Some people may need a little extra training or on the job coaching. Other volunteers may lack confidence, and need reassurance that they are doing things correctly.

It's worth considering peer support. This could be through a buddying system, or volunteers meetings for example. As well as providing support for new volunteers a buddying system is a good way of recognising the expertise of experienced volunteers. Volunteer meetings are a chance for volunteers to collectively have input into the work and daily life of an organisation, but can also give volunteers a chance to share experiences.

Think about motivation

Development of the volunteer. Some people will be happy to come in week in week out carrying out the same role. Other people thrive on fresh challenges.

Named person for people to take problems to. Also responsibility for ensuring that volunteers have work to do, now what they are doing.

Supervision meetings

Supervision meetings may not be appropriate for all models of volunteer involvement, but for many volunteers it is the best way of ensuring that they get a chance to give and receive feedback. They offer the chance for an open two way conversation about the volunteers work.

Avoid it being seen as an appraisal - many people will have the workplace model in their head, and images of being grilled by the boss. Reassure volunteers that it's a chance to talk in a private space, and that it's as much about you listening to the volunteer as you talking to them.

Arrange a private space for the supervision meeting. It's meant to be a chance for the volunteer to speak their mind, which is impossible if they feel they can be heard by others.

Some obvious questions to ask are:

- What's gone well?
- What hasn't?
- Are there any other tasks within the organisation you would like to do?

- Do you feel there is any support or training you need?

Encourage volunteers to raise problems or concerns. It's much easier to deal with a problem at an early stage than let it grow into something which disrupts the work of the volunteer or even the whole volunteering programme.

Give clear feedback. Make sure that you let volunteers know that you are pleased with their work its important that neither the volunteer nor the supervisor gets into the habit of viewing the meetings as gripe sessions.

Where there are problems about the volunteers work or behaviour don't be afraid to raise them. Always remember that the problem is the behaviour not the individual, and phrase the issue as a shared problem what steps do you need to take together to improve things?

Other models

Where regular formal supervision meetings are not appropriate to your involvement of volunteers, you should consider finding other ways of giving and receiving feedback. This could be through informal catch ups, or ringing round home based volunteers for example. The above questions are still likely to be a useful base for such conversations, but of course they may need to be adapted to the situation. Where involving volunteers in a one day project you may simply need to chat to everyone involved and make sure they are happy with the training they received and understand what they are doing.

Reproduced with permission from NCVO.